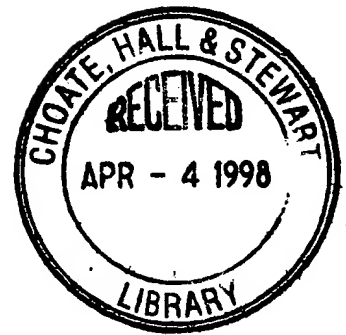


**VAN NOSTRAND'S**  
**SCIENTIFIC**  
**ENCYCLOPEDIA**  
*Eighth Edition*



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Printed in the United States of America

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69469 Weinheim  
Germany

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2-6 Boundary Row  
London  
SE1 8HN  
United Kingdom

International Thomson Publishing Asia  
221 Henderson Road #05-10  
Henderson Building  
Singapore 0315

Thomas Nelson Australia  
102 Dodds Street  
South Melbourne, 3205  
Victoria, Australia

International Thomson Publishing Japan  
Hirakawacho Kyowa Building, 3F  
2-2-1 Hirakawacho  
Chiyoda-ku, 102 Tokyo  
Japan

Nelson Canada  
1120 Birchmount Road  
Scarborough, Ontario  
Canada M1K 5G4

International Thomson Editores  
Campos Eliseos 385, Piso 7  
Col. Polanco  
11560 Mexico D.F. Mexico

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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Van Nostrand's scientific encyclopedia / Douglas M. Considine, editor.

Glenn D. Considine, managing editor.—8th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-442-01864-9 (set).—ISBN 0-442-01865-7 (v. 1).—ISBN

0-442-01868-1 (v. 2.)

1. Science—Encyclopedias. 2. Engineering—Encyclopedias.

I. Considine, Douglas M. II. Title: Scientific encyclopedia.

Q121.V3 1994

503—dc20

94-29100

CIP

ablation. The deposition of snow is the major form of glacial alimentation, but other forms of precipitation, along with sublimation, refreezing of melted water, etc., also contribute. The additional mass produced by alimentation is termed accumulation.

**ALIPHATIC COMPOUND.** An organic compound that can be regarded as a derivative of methane,  $\text{CH}_4$ . Most aliphatic compounds are open carbon chains, straight or branched, saturated or unsaturated. Originally, the term was used to denote the higher (fatty) acids of the  $\text{C}_n\text{H}_{2n}\text{O}_2$  series. The word is derived from the Greek term for oil. See also **Compound (Chemical)**; **Organic Chemistry**.

**ALKALI.** A term that was originally applied to the hydroxides and carbonates of sodium and potassium but since has been extended to include the hydroxides and carbonates of the other alkali metals and ammonium. Alkali hydroxides are characterized by ability to form soluble soaps with fatty acids, to restore color to litmus which has been reddened by acids, and to unite with carbon dioxide to form soluble compounds. See also **Acids and Bases**.

**ALKALI METALS.** The elements of group 1 of the periodic classification. In order of increasing atomic number, they are hydrogen, lithium, sodium, potassium, rubidium, cesium, and francium. With exception of hydrogen which is a gas and which frequently imparts a quality of acidity to its compounds, the other members of the group display rather striking similarities of chemical behavior, all reactive with  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  to form strongly alkaline solutions. The elements in the group, including hydrogen, are characterized by a valence of one, having one electron in an outer shell available for reaction. Because of their chemical similarities, these elements, along with ammonium and sometimes magnesium, are considered the sixth group in classical qualitative chemical analysis separations.

**ALKALINE EARTHS.** The elements of group 2 of the periodic classification. In order of increasing atomic number, they are beryllium, magnesium, calcium, strontium, barium, and radium. The members of the group display rather striking similarities of chemical behavior, including stable oxides and carbonates, with hydroxides that are less alkaline than those of group 1. The elements of the group are characterized by a valence of two, having two electrons in an outer shell available for reaction. Because of their chemical similarities, these elements are considered the fifth group in classical qualitative chemical analysis separations.

**ALKALI ROCKS.** Igneous rocks which contain a relatively high amount of alkalis in the form of soda amphiboles, soda pyroxenes, or feldspaths, are said to be alkaline, or alkalic. Igneous rocks in which the proportions of both lime and alkalis are high, as combined in the minerals, feldspar, hornblende, and augite, are said to be calcalkalic.

**ALKALOIDS.** The term, alkaloid, which was first proposed by the pharmacist, W. Meissner, in 1819, and means "alkali-like," is applied to basic, nitrogen-containing compounds of plant origin. Two further qualifications usually are added to this definition: (1) the compounds have complex molecular structures; and (2) manifest significant pharmacological activity. Such compounds occur only in certain genera and families, rarely being universally distributed in larger groups of plants. Many widely distributed bases of plant origin, such as methyltrimethyl- and other open-chain simple alkylamines, the choline, and the phenylalkylamines, are not classed as alkaloids. Alkaloids usually have a rather complex structure with the nitrogen atom involved in a heterocyclic ring. However, thiamine, a heterocyclic nitrogenous base, is not regarded as an alkaloid mainly because of its almost universal distribution in living matter. Colchicine, on the other hand, is classed as an alkaloid even though it is not basic and its nitrogen atom is not incorporated into a heterocyclic ring. It apparently qualifies as an alkaloid

because of its particular pharmacological activity and limited distribution in the plant world.

Over 2000 alkaloids are known and it is estimated that they are present in only 10–15% of all vascular plants. They are rarely found in cryptogamia (exception, ergot alkaloids), gymnosperms, or monocotyledons. They occur abundantly in certain dicotyledons and particularly in the following families: *Apocynaceae* (dogbane, quebracho, pereiro bark); *Papaveraceae* (poppies, chelidonium); *Papilionaceae* (lupins, butterfly-shaped flowers); *Ranunculaceae* (aconitum, delphinium); *Rubiaceae* (cinchona bark, ipecacuanha); *Rutaceae* (citrus, fagara); and *Solanaceae* (tobacco, deadly nightshade, tomato, potato, thorn apple). Well-characterized alkaloids have been isolated from the roots, seeds, leaves or bark of some 40 plant families. *Papaveraceae* is an unusual family, in that all of its species contain alkaloids.

Brief descriptions in alphabetical order of alkaloids of commercial or medical importance or of societal concern (alkaloid narcotics) are given later in this entry. See also **Amphetamine**; **Addiction (Drug)**; **Morphine**; and **Pyridine and Derivatives**.

The nomenclature of alkaloids has not been systemized, both because of the complexity of the compounds and for historical reasons. The two commonly used systems classify alkaloids either according to the plant genera in which they occur, or on the basis of similarity of molecular structure. Important classes of alkaloids containing generically related members are the aconitum, cinchona, ephedra, lupin, opium, rauwolfia, senecio, solanum, and strychnos alkaloids. Chemically derived alkaloid names are based upon the skeletal feature which members of a group possess in common. Thus, indole alkaloids (e.g., psilocybin, the active principle of Mexican hallucinogenic mushrooms) contain an indole or modified indole nucleus, and pyrrolidine alkaloids (e.g., hygrine) contain the pyrrolidine ring system. Other examples of this type of classification include the pyridine, quinoline, isoquinoline, imidazole, pyridine-pyrrolidine, and piperidine-pyrrolidine type alkaloids. Several alkaloids are summarized along these general terms in the accompanying table.

The beginning of alkaloid chemistry is usually considered to be 1805 when F. W. Sertürner first isolated morphine. He prepared several salts of morphine and demonstrated that it was the principle responsible for the physiological effect of opium. Alkaloid research has continued to date, but because most likely plant sources have been investigated and because a large number of synthetic drugs serve medical and other needs more effectively, the greatest emphasis has been placed upon the synthetics.

Sometimes, there is confusion between alkaloids and narcotics. It should be stressed that all alkaloids are not narcotics; and all narcotics are not alkaloids. A narcotic has the general definition of a drug which produces sleep or stupor, and also relieves pain. Many alkaloids do not meet these specifications.

The molecular complexity of the alkaloids is demonstrated by the accompanying figure. Alkaloids react as bases to form salts. The salts used especially for crystallization purposes are the hydrochlorides, sulfates, and oxalates which are generally soluble in water or alcohol, insoluble in ether, chloroform, carbon tetrachloride, or amyl alcohol. Alkaloid salts unite with mercury, gold, and platinum chlorides. Free alkaloids lack characteristic color reactions but react with certain reagents, as follows, with (1) iodine in potassium iodide solution, forming chocolate brown precipitate; (2) mercuric iodide in potassium iodide solution (potassium mercuriiodide), forming precipitate; (3) potassium iodobismuthate, forming orange-red precipitate; (4) bromine-saturated concentrated hydrobromic acid forming yellow precipitate; (5) tannic acid, forming precipitate; (6) molybdophosphoric acid, forming precipitate; (7) tungstophosphoric acid, forming precipitate; (8) gold(III) chloride, forming crystalline precipitate of characteristic melting point; (9) platinum(IV) chloride, forming crystalline precipitate of characteristic melting point; (10) picric acid, forming precipitate; (11) perchloric acid, forming precipitate. Many alkaloids form more or less characteristic colors with acids, solutions of acidic salts, etc.

The function of alkaloids in the source plant has not been fully explained. Some authorities simply regard them as by-products of the plant metabolism. Others conceive of alkaloids as reservoirs for protein synthesis; as protective materials discouraging animal or insect attacks; as plant stimulants or regulators in such activities as growth, metabo-